

Ms. Chair Person and Members of the Committee:

Good Morning. My name is Val Piercy and my daughter Jennifer and I are here today to advocate for persons on the waiting list and for increased funding for provider agencies in our State. We also want to thank you and the legislature for the outstanding job you're doing in supporting persons with special needs. I know how tough your job is and am confident you will do the right thing for all citizens in need of your support.

Jennifer is a success story and my family is very grateful to the State of Montana for her funding and services. She is receiving Supported Living and Employment expansion 'general fund' dollars and has done so since April 1998. Jennifer is 28 years old and is receiving services through the Child Development Center in Missoula. CDC has been instrumental in supporting Jennifer over the years. A heartfelt thank you goes to the staff of CDC, in particular Karen Robertson and Michelle Running for their continued assistance, daily care and financial management of Jennifer's budget.

Jennifer is a very active member of the Missoula Community. She has been a volunteer for Community Hospital for over 10 years and has volunteered for over 5 years with the Missoula Food Bank and the Meals on Wheels program. When she's not volunteering, she is working on her speech development, recreating in town or working out at a local gym. She is particularly proud of her volunteerism and loves her customers.

Her program wouldn't be possible without the financial support of the State and the very special people at CDC.

Getting to where we are today has not been easy. Jennifer is a person with significant disabilities – both developmentally and mental health wise. She has had her fair share of behavioral challenges, health crisis' and has been at risk of out of home placement on more than one occasion. The road to get where we are today has been rough at times and at times very painful for her and the family. Keeping Jennifer at home with her family can be like walking a tight rope. In years past we have struggled with very severe behavioral problems including Jen hurting herself and hurting other people. She has struggled with seizures, chronic breathing problems and bi-polar illness that has had her on a roller coaster of extreme emotions. She has had moments of very high highs then acute violence – severe crying then robust

laughter. Even today, after all these years she sleeps about 4 hours a night – just enough to rev her engine, then she's up and raring to go.....

Bi-polar illness coupled with developmental disabilities can be a volatile combination. It broke our hearts to see her suffer because she never seemed to be at peace. She never seemed to be rested

But with it all, as always, we got through it. People were there to help. CDC was there to help. The folks at the Developmental Disabilities office were there to help. We got through it as we always do and here we are today. Life is good! Jennifer is her mom's 'angel-cake' and I'm so proud of her. I'm also so very proud of the work she does in our community. She, too has made a difference in the lives of others.

The waiting list for DD services projected for fiscal year 2007 is 484. These are folks with no services. People in need of additional services are projected to be a whopping 836. I know how important services are and how these folks would benefit from agencies like CDC. Image other children like Jennifer being able to receive the same quality care and attention that my Jennifer has received. Image a young child and their family receiving the same support as CDC has given my daughter these past 10 years. Image overcoming extreme obstacles and becoming a strong contributor in your community... it can happen.

Provider agencies like CDC make the difference for our families. I strongly encourage the committee to fund developmental disability programs at the \$30 million biennium increase level requested by the DPHHS. I also support the \$11.4 million in the governor's budget for people on the wait list in addition to the 30 million increase for community infrastructure.

Thank you for all you've done and thank you for your commitment to the citizens of our great state.



Val Piercy on behalf of Jennifer Piercy
Missoula (406) 273-5470 / (406) 240-8383

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